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OBSERVATIONS ON A RECENT TRIP TO THE FORMER SOVIET UNION

BY,
JAMES JOHN TRITTEN

AUGUST 26, 1992

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Prepared for: Naval Intelligence Command
NIC-12
4600 Silver Hill Rd.
Washington, D. C. 20389-5000

Intelligence Plans & Integration
Directorate
DAMI-PII-T PNT Room 2C475
Deputy Chief of Staff for
Intelligence
Headquarters, Department of the
Army
Washington, D.C. 20310-1063

Q2 33 3 022

92-26434



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The research reported here was funded by and prepared for The Naval Intelligence Command (NIC-12) and the Army Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence (DAMI-PII-T).

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This report was written by:



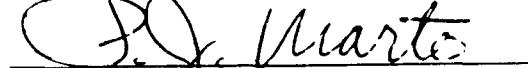
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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

| | | | |
|--|--|--|---|
| 1a. REPORT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION UNCLASSIFIED | | 1b. RESTRICTIVE MARKINGS | |
| 2a. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION AUTHORITY | | 3. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY OF REPORT APPROVED FOR PUBLIC RELEASE DISTRIBUTION IS UNLIMITED | |
| 2b. DECLASSIFICATION/DOWNGRADING SCHEDULE | | | |
| 4. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S) NPS-NS-92-012 | | 5. MONITORING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S) | |
| 6a. NAME OF PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL | 6b. OFFICE SYMBOL <i>(If Applicable)</i> NS/TR | 7a. NAME OF MONITORING ORGANIZATION NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL | |
| 6c. ADDRESS <i>(city, state, and ZIP code)</i> MONTEREY, CA 93943-5100 | | 7b. ADDRESS <i>(city, state, and ZIP code)</i> MONTEREY, CA 93943-5100 | |
| 8a. NAME OF FUNDING/SPONSORING ORGANIZATION NAVAL INTELLIGENCE COMMAND | 8b. OFFICE SYMBOL <i>(If Applicable)</i> NIC-12 | 9. PROCUREMENT INSTRUMENT IDENTIFICATION NUMBER | |
| 8c. ADDRESS <i>(city, state, and ZIP code)</i> 4600 SILVER HILL RD. WASHINGTON, D.C. 20389-5000 | | 10. SOURCE OF FUNDING NUMBERS | |
| | | PROGRAM ELEMENT NO. MIPR NO | PROJECT NO. 001592W |
| | | MIPR RO 9X026 | TASK NO. R18382 (ARMY) |
| | | WORK UNIT NAVY | |
| 11. TITLE <i>(Include Security Classification)</i> OBSERVATIONS ON A RECENT TRIP TO THE FORMER SOVIET UNION | | | |
| 12. PERSONAL AUTHOR(S) TRITTEN, JAMES JOHN | | | |
| 13a. TYPE OF REPORT FINAL | 13b. TIME COVERED JUL 92 TO AUG 92 | 14. DATE OF REPORT <i>(year, month, day)</i> AUGUST 1992 | 15. PAGE COUNT 22 |
| 16. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTATION PRESENTED TO 7TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE ON CRISIS STABILITY AND THE OFFENSE/DEFENSE RELATIONSHIP, AUGUST 26, 1992, NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL | | | |
| 17. COSATI CODES | | 18. SUBJECT TERMS <i>(Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number)</i> | |
| FIELD | GROUP | SUBGROUP | RUSSIA UKRAINE COMMONWEALTH OF INDEPENDENT STATES |
| | | | |
| 19. ABSTRACT <i>(Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number)</i> | | | |
| (8 A-C) ADDITIONAL SPONSOR, INTELLIGENCE PLANS & INTEGRATION DIRECTORATE (DAMI-PII-T. PNT ROOM 2C475) DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF FOR INTELLIGENCE, HEADQUARTERS, DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY, WASHINGTON, D.C. 20310-1063. | | | |
| (16) THE VIEWS EXPRESSED IN THIS PAPER ARE THESE OF THE AUTHOR AND DO NOT REFLECT THE OFFICIAL POLICY OR POSITION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF THE U.S. GOVERNMENT | | | |
| REPORT OF INITIAL SUBSTANTIVE OBSERVATIONS MADE DURING RESEARCH TRIP TO RUSSIA AND THE UKRAINE DURING JULY 1992. COMMENTARY MADE IN THE FOLLOWING AREAS: CURRENT POLITICAL ISSUES AND PERSONALITIES, MILITARY SCIENCE, THE WESTERN THEATER OF WAR, HOW THE RUSSIANS LEARN ABOUT THE U.S., NUCLEAR AND OTHER HARDWARE ISSUES, AND WHAT THE RUSSIANS AND UKRAINIANS WERE INTERESTED IN FINDING OUT. REPORT CONCLUDES THAT RESEARCH ACTIVITIES WERE WELL WORTH COSTS AND RECOMMENDS ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES IN THE FUTURE. | | | |
| 20. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY OF ABSTRACT | | 21. ABSTRACT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION UNCLASSIFIED | |
| 22a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE INDIVIDUAL JAMES JOHN TRITTEN | | 22b. TELEPHONE <i>(Include Area Code)</i> (408) 646-2143 | 22c. OFFICE SYMBOL NS/TR |

Observations on a Recent Trip to the Former Soviet Union

by
James John Tritten¹

Introduction

When the Bush administration formulated it's new national security strategy in mid-1990, it made certain assumptions about the security and military threat posed by the then-Soviet Union. Generally that threat was described as having receded to a level where the U.S. would have up to two-years of warning prior to a major European-centered global war.¹ With the demise of the former "evil empire," the Bush administration and the Joint Chiefs of Staff re-evaluated the threat from the defunct USSR and made new assumptions about the security and military threat posed by the Russian and other former Soviet republics. In May 1992, the Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff wrote that the U.S. could now count on eight to ten-years strategic warning before a resurgent/emergent global threat arose.²

Students and faculty of the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) recently returned from a twenty-one day educational exchange visit to Russia and the Ukraine. The group, led by the author, from the School's Department of National Security Affairs, included four Navy, three Air Force, and one Army officer students who are specializing in Russian area studies. Funding was provided by the individual services under the Defense Advanced Language and Area Studies (DALASP) and the Quality of Analysis (QofA) Programs.

The July 1992 trip to Russia and the Ukraine was made to help the researchers determine what is the current state of the former Soviet Union and specifically the state of the various republic military forces? What the researchers hoped to determine is if the Bush administration's planning assumptions are still valid? The answer to that question is the subject for subsequent additional research and analysis, the full results of which will not be available until 1993.

The researchers will either conclude that America's assumptions about the former Soviet Union are no longer valid and the U.S. and NATO need to modify defense programs, or, that the planned demobilization of the West's armed forces that were once poised against the USSR can, and should, take place. Such analysis obviously addresses the sources of future international stability and instability and the prospective U.S. foreign policy and defense role - both subjects for active consideration by many of us.

1. The views expressed by the author are his alone and do not necessarily represent those of the U.S. government, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Navy.

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| Distribution | Availabilty | Dist | Special |
| A-1 | | | |

The trip offered a unique opportunity to study the evolving former Soviet republics' military doctrines and military strategies and the roles and missions that will be assigned to their armed forces. The student and faculty researchers placed major emphasis on observing the results of the changes in the military caused by the breakup of the Soviet Union and the subsequent emergence of independent republics. While in Russia and the Ukraine, the group had the opportunity to interact with faculty members, researchers, and military officers at the Military History Institute, the Frunze Academy, the Institute of the U.S.A. and Canada Studies, the Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO), the Vasilevsky Air Defense Academy, and other military-academic institutions.

The Russian military opened up certain geographic and functional areas to the NPS students and faculty that heretofore had been closed to Western visitors. Among the highlights were a visit to the Khronstadt naval base (soon to become the headquarters and location for the bulk of the Russian Baltic Fleet) the armor museum at Kubinka, the aviation museum at Monino, and the museum for artillery, engineering, and communications troops in St. Petersburg. The NPS students and faculty attended special seminars at these sites and had an audience with a Deputy Defense Minister for the new republic of the Ukraine.

The comments below represent the raw results of some of the research conducted on the trip. Documentation is not included since no rules were established for attribution, or not, by each individual interviewed. This will be clarified in writing before any statements are directly attributed in public documents to Russian or Ukrainian sources. The sources of the information below range from a deputy minister of defense to serving general officers to senior civilian academic researchers to civilian and military instructors and professors. The sources worked at various ministries, military academies, and institutes well known to us in the West. Additional and detailed research results will be published by NPS and should be available in early 1993.

Personalities and Current Political Issues

One of more intriguing questions that we had concerned a series of Spring 1992 pro-Navy interviews with Andrey Afanasyevich Kokoshin, now Deputy Defense Minister for Russia, when he was serving as the Deputy Director of the U.S.A. and Canada Institute.³ The character of these articles was inconsistent with the earlier positions taken on defense by Kokoshin. We were told that these articles were an attempt to buy favor from the Navy (since Kokoshin was openly being considered for the position of Russian Defense Minister at the time) or the easy way out; i.e. it would be easier establish a large navy on his initial platform and if necessary to later say Russia could not afford or did not need one than it would be to subsequently argue that Russia needed a large ocean-going fleet.

We were also told that Kokoshin was supposed to get the job as defense minister and that it was not clear why he did not. Apparently the Russian military backed Kokoshin since they wanted a civilian who could and would say "no" to Russian President Boris Nikolayevich Yeltsin. We were told that the military did not want the man who eventually was appointed Russian Defense Minister, General-Colonel Pavel Sergeyevich Grachev, because the military was afraid that a serving officer would simply do what he was told and not resist Yeltsin if necessary. When we asked about the importance of the Commander-in-Chief of the Joint Armed Forces of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Marshal of Aviation Yevgeny Ivanovich Shaposhnikov, we were told that he is not as important as he once was now that Russia has formed its own armed forces.

The concept of the CIS as a political replacement for the old USSR is not well understood by the Western media. No Russian or Ukrainian ever referred to or used the term CIS during our trip. What was used, is the name of the nation that we were in. We observed a resurgence of strong national pride. We came away with the conclusion that the military of the Ukrainian republic is primarily loyal to Ukraine and not to Russia or the CIS. We had received earlier suggestions from Russians that the Ukrainian armed forces would actually be manned by Russians as the solution for how the Russians were going to protect their southwestern borders. That concept appears to be a Russian dream not shared by anyone that we met in the Ukraine.

The Russians and Ukrainians appeared to have settled the Black Sea Fleet by first deciding the type of political relationship they wanted and letting that determine the importance of the fleet controversy. The politicians did not let their military leaders determine the outcome of this issue, which seemed to us to be a very healthy sign.

After noting with a number of Russians the openness of the current era and contrasted it with other historical periods of similar disclosure, we asked when this current period would close. The answer that we were most often given was "soon." Our conclusion was that we should take full advantage of the current opportunity to learn about the Russians and Ukrainians from visits such as ours.

Russian Military Science

There has been an age-old debate over how Soviet military science organized war. We attempted to learn how well the West actually knew Soviet military science. Regarding war's technical characteristics, the Russians acknowledged that local/global was the first order of distinction; the choice of nuclear or conventional weapons was a secondary or tertiary issue. We were also told that the former Chief of the General Staff of the USSR, Marshal of the Soviet Union Nikolay Vasilevich Ogarkov, spoke out against relying on nuclear weapons as early as 1966 at the Voroshilov General Staff Academy. This early date appears to be

not known in the West and we were promised a copy of the transcript of this very early lecture.

We were told that the strategic missions of the Soviet armed forces found in the 1987 book *The Navy* and elsewhere⁴ are not new and that they can be inferred from the published mid-1970s lectures from the Voroshilov Academy.⁵ Upon our return, a comparison of the strategic missions contained in *The Navy* and those found in the mid-1970s Voroshilov Academy lecture notes reveals significant differences in emphasis and content. As we know, the strategic missions contained in *The Navy* also differed significantly from those published by Marshal Vasilev Danilovich Sokolovskiy in his book *Military Strategy*.⁶ Everyone that we talked to agreed that the strategic missions of the Russian or Ukrainian armed forces will be different than either of these once new military doctrines and strategies are approved.⁷

We also had a series of discussions about the similarity of future ground warfare with naval warfare and were told that the Russians were researching this subject. This appears to be one of their lessons learned from the Persian Gulf war⁸ and parallels research previously published in the West.⁹

Russian Military History

The Russians defined military history as anything that happened through yesterday; hence they felt more "comfortable" in discussing the history of the Persian Gulf war, or the history of the initial Yeltsin period, etc., rather than emerging doctrine and strategy. Our discussions of history often were surrogates for discussions of today's issues. The Soviet military reforms of 1924-1925 were most often used for such purposes and we spent a considerable period of time considering the applicability of that period to today. The Russians made sure that we received the message that they would not simply replicate the forces developed or the military strategy during that era.

Most of the instructors at the Frunze Academy said that they have no substantive knowledge of Czarist-era Russian military history, especially during its final days. They are only now being allowed to research this period and hope to use history to replace the legitimacy for their regime that was once provided for by ideology. We were told, however, that it is neither new nor unusual for Russians to research the defensive or initial period of the Second Great Patriotic War.¹⁰ The recent research that we have seen published in their literature about the defensive is not new research, but rather research that had been performed previously. This research was not, however, available to those outside of the "system" since it was previously classified secret.

We were told by the Russians that we should take advantage of military historical research that they have done already so that we would not need to perform it. Under "scientific" socialism, once a topic has been thoroughly and correctly researched,

it need not be done again by anyone again since only one answer was possible. We were somewhat surprised that this view is still alive and well in newly "democratic" Russia.

The Western Theater of War

We had numerous discussions about the Western reports of old Soviet/Warsaw Pact nuclear war plans for the western theater of military operations (WTVD). These plans were recently published by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) in their journal *Survival*.¹¹ Most Russians were aware of the publication. This subject was perhaps the most sensitive of all that we addressed with the Russians. At least one individual acknowledged the existence and authenticity of these plans and stated that nuclear operations were indeed to begin early in any war with the West but they would have been limited to the WTVD. We asked numerous individuals if the leaks were authoritative and were told yes and that plans were being changed.

These plans did not correspond to themes used in articles, speeches, and books of Marshal Ogarkov during the 1980s. It seemed to us in the West that Ogarkov had not advocated nuclear strikes during strategic operations in the WTVD and we had taken his writings as evidence that Soviet military strategy and operational art had changed to deemphasize nuclear war fighting. We were told that Marshal Ogarkov did not speak for the military when he wrote those articles and monographs and that we should have never interpreted those as anything more than his personal views. If this is true, then much recent content analysis of Soviet military literature may be fatally flawed.

Others in our group, not from NPS, were more interested in proposed operations in the Northwestern TVD (NWTVD) and asked similar direct questions. They were told that Soviet war plans did not call for an invasion of Finmark under normal circumstances, but that there were contingency plans to go through Sweden and occupy northern Norway as far south as Tromsö. Such operations were not, however, to be central to the overall war effort.

We were asked how it would be interpreted in the West if a variant three defensive military doctrine (Battle of Khalkhin Gol surrogate) would be replaced by variant two (Battle of Kursk surrogate). The Russians hinted that they were headed in that direction but that the offensive counterattack might take place primarily with air power (but not only with those forces). The Russians said that such a change should not bother us with buffer states now between Russia and Germany.

Russian Military Education System

We confirmed that the business of the Frunze and Vasilevsky Academies is operational art and tactics. We were told that there are no Air Force or Navy officers (students or faculty) at these academies. This somewhat surprised us since many in the West assumed the Soviet educational system for the command and

general staff-level was similar to our own. Frunze students study very little outside of their own ground forces; for example, the Normandy invasion is studied at the Frunze Academy only as a defensive operation and not in the context of projecting power from the sea.

Each military service has its own schools for command and general staff. "Combined arms," at the operational-level of warfare as taught at the Frunze Academy, is restricted to integration of all branches of the Ground Forces. The first time the Soviet/Russian military gets together for multi-service, or "joint," education is at General Staff Academy. This means that the Western perception by many that "combined arms" operations (at the operational-level of warfare) was a Soviet strength was incorrect.

We asked about the impact on the curricula of academies of the demise of an ideological role for the armed forces. We were told that they had already revised their curricula but did not add any new materials. Apparently they allowed for additional in-depth coverage of what was already specified instead. We were also told that the Frunze Academy previously spent 90% of their time teaching nuclear or nuclear-related aspects of war and armed conflict but that this is now down to around 10%.

We concluded from discussions of correlation of forces and how to construct equivalent division and effective equivalent divisions that our methods were very similar. The Russians made great pains to use Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE)-approved numbers. We also had a discussion about net assessment as a methodology. We discussed the use of the IISS *Military Balance* numbers rather than "real" numbers for education and training. Most Russians seemed familiar with this document and said that they used it for basic classroom exercises. None used it for homework since, as we were told, Russian military officers are not assigned any homework nor at-home readings while attending academies.

How do the Russians Learn About us?

A discussion which we had with virtually every instructor with whom we talked involved how did the Soviets and how do the Russians develop specialists about other nations? We were told that this is strictly the role of intelligence services and that there is no counterpart to Foreign Area Officers (FAOs) or sub-specialists as found in the U.S. armed forces. At the Frunze Academy instructors are merely given materials about the U.S. to use in the classroom and are not expected to deviate from that material. We discussed a wide variety of alternative plans and sources of information.

We asked most Russians and Ukrainians if they were familiar with the KGB's Operation RYAN, as reported by former KGB General Oleg Gordievsky.¹² All said yes and that Operation RYAN was real. This topic was used in many additional discussions as an

example of how bad the KGB understood us and how dangerous it was to place all their emphasis on learning about the U.S. on a system that could have produced RYAN.

The Russians and Ukrainians seemed to not understand that in the U.S., there might be officially published service positions on the lessons of the Persian Gulf war that might differ with views published by the Office of the Secretary of Defense or the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Although we can see this in their own writing, it seems to be a failure in understanding how to do proper content analysis of U.S. literature evidence. They also seemed to have great difficulty in understanding us since we did not use standardized terms in our politico-military literature. When Westerners use Soviet or Russian terms,¹³ they took this as evidence that we had finally adopted the "correct" (Russian) terms.

After reviewing comments on some of our own research and the lack of depth of sources from their own country, most of us concluded that although we are in America, we often have access to some better Russian sources than they do. Duplication and compartmentalization of efforts within Russia have resulted in a lack of awareness of what internal resources are already available. The definition of initiative does not appear to include researching any areas that have not been "assigned."

Nuclear and Other Issues

We were told that Soviet nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs) already had a permissive action link (PAL) system to prevent inadvertent launch. PAL authorization would have to be received in data form in order to be useful, i.e. an alternative scenario of telephone authorization would not be sufficient to "unlock" the systems. We were also told that the Russians would move more of their nuclear weapons out to sea on board SSBNs and might be willing to give up the other two legs of the triad.

We also discussed Soviet nuclear targeting and Russian President Yeltsin's statement that Russian missiles were no longer targeting American (and other) cities.¹⁴ This "shift" did not require actual changes since, we were told, cities were not targeted by design, only as an unfortunate consequence. Hence when some in Russia said that nothing has changed as a result of Yeltsin's actions, they are right.¹⁵

We were told that the Soviets had "fooled us" over the Tu-22 BACKFIRE bomber and that it obviously was an intercontinental weapons system. We were told that they could retrofit the refueling probe within hours. We were also told that since superpower nuclear weapons issues are now essentially settled, the numbers of warheads were going down substantially, and no one was arguing internally over the role of nuclear weapons, the Strategic Rocket Forces would be ranked lower in the overall precedence of military services.

Regarding a new revolution in military affairs, we were told that although a new revolution was regarded as theoretically possible (due to advances in technology), it would not happen due to the realities of the economy. There would be no opportunities for serial development of many new weapons and the Russians will shift to a prototyping system to keep up with the West.

We were told that the Russian fleet would be limited to the Barents and Northern Norwegian Seas, the Bering Sea and Sea of Okhotsk, and the Northern Sea of Japan and specifically that it would not deploy along the U.S. sea lines of communications.

What Were They Interested in From Us?

Russians questions of us involved six main areas: American politics and politico-military doctrine and strategy; nuclear issues; naval forces; NATO and Europe; war gaming; and about themselves.

In the first area, the Russians were interested in: the probable results of the upcoming U.S. presidential elections; how would we implement our new military doctrine and strategy; how could the new military doctrine and strategy actually have been developed in a top-down manner; the status of the Competitive Strategies Initiative (CSI); the difficulty of conversion and reconversion of industry; what were America's unilateral capabilities to wage a strategic-level war and operational-level campaign; and the lessons of the Persian Gulf war?

In the nuclear area, the Russians asked us: if the recent agreements on nuclear arms between Presidents George Bush and Yeltsin would require a revision of our new national military doctrine and strategy; if lower numbers of strategic nuclear warheads might suggest a shift to countervalue and non-prompt nuclear targeting; how long it would take from receipt of warning until our nuclear forces could respond; how the American military viewed the deep reductions in nuclear forces; if the U.S. military thought they would reprogram nuclear resources into conventional forces; and what was the future of the strategic defense initiative (SDI) and the global protection against limited strikes (GPALS) program?

Regarding naval forces, the Russians asked: if any of the documents concerning the new U.S. military doctrine and strategy addressed sea communications and if we assumed any opposition at sea; if we would now revise the AIRLAND battle doctrine and if would it become an Air-Land-Sea doctrine; what was the future of the U.S. Sixth Fleet; about naval arms control, specifically an attempt to control naval arms through budget limitations; and why the U.S., the British, and/or the French were still patrolling off their coasts in the new international security environment when they had ended all patrols off our coasts?

With regard to NATO and Europe, the Russians asked: what was the impact on NATO of the creation of Western European Union (WEU) armed forces; what was the number of U.S. troops and divisions to be left in Europe under the current plan and our best guess for the post-election period; whether the West ever had serious plans to invade the Warsaw Treaty states; and why were we upgrading the Pershing missiles? In discussions about military capabilities versus intentions we were asked why each of us had looked first at capabilities instead of intentions. They wanted to know why we did not have plans to fight France or the United Kingdom since these nations had capabilities to attack the U.S.?

The Russians also wanted to know how we do simulations and war gaming; man/man or man/machine and if we had special teams to play the enemy or computer models instead? We were told that they now use green and dark blue to represent two opposing sides. Regarding themselves, the Russians and Ukrainians asked us about future cooperative security actions and how we thought the Russian/Ukrainian Black Sea Fleet issue should be settled.

One thing that surprised us was what they did not want to know. During questions and answers that followed a presentation about our new national security strategy, the Ukrainians did not want us to explain our planning scenarios, saying that they already had studied those and understood them.

Conclusions

From the perspective of the participants of the trip and the sponsors who funded it, the benefits appear to be well worth the costs involved. Each student will take with him/her the experiences from their three-week exposure to the Russians and Ukrainians and use that experience during their military career. From the perspective of a faculty member, it is clear that both NPS instruction and research will benefit as well.

The participants of this research trip intend to prepare additional technical reports as well as student theses based upon their experiences while in Russia and the Ukraine. It is hoped that the successes of this first endeavor will lead to repetition while the current "window" of openness remains open and an expansion of DALASP/QofA funded activities for students and faculty in other areas of the world.

Notes

(1) For details on the assumptions behind the new national security strategy, see James J. Tritten, "America Promises to Come Back: The President's New National Security Strategy," *Security Studies*, 1, no. 2 (Winter 1991): 173-179.

(2) Admiral David E. Jeremiah, USN, "Beyond the Cold War," *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, 118, no. 5 (May 1992): 55.

(3) Yelena Agapova interview with Andrey Afanasyevich Kokoshin, deputy director of the U.S.A. and Canada Institute, with addi-

tional questions by Fred Hiatt from the Washington Post, "Before You Form an Army You Should Know What it is for - Expert Andrey Kokoshin Believes," Moscow *Krasnaya Zvezda* in Russian, March 17, 1992, pp. 1, 2 (FBIS-SOV-92-053, March 18, 1992, p. 27); and Aleksandr Putko interview with Andrey A. Kokoshin, "The Army Can Become a Platform for Accord," Moscow *Kuranty* in Russian, April 15, 1992, p. 5 (FBIS-SOV-92-074, April 16, 1992, p. 28). A strong Navy statement is attributed in the translation to Putko, but from the context of the remarks and the placement of subsequent identification of who spoke when, it is very likely that this is a translation error and Kokoshin make the comment.

(4) Admiral of the Fleet of the Soviet Union Sergey Georgiyevich Gorshkov, ed., *The Navy: Its Role, Prospects for Development, and Employment* in Russian (Moscow: Voyenizdat, 1988): pp. 34-42 (Naval Intelligence Command translation, pp. 27-33); and Captain 2nd Rank V. Dotsenko, "Soviet Art of Naval Warfare in the Postwar Period," Moscow *Morskoy Sbornik* in Russian, no. 7 (July 1989): 22-28 (NIC-RSTP-113-89, pp. 31-39); and Georgiy M. Sturua, "A View on the Navy Through the Prism of Military *Perestroyka*," Moscow *Mirovaya Ekonomika I Mezhdunarodnyye Otnosheniya* in Russian, no. 5, 1990 (JPRS-UMA-90-016, July 11, 1990, pp. 49-51). In addition, two of the new strategic missions, "repelling of a missile attack from space" and the "utter routing of the armed forces and military potential of the enemy," were specifically criticized by Aleksey Georgiyevich Arbatov, thus indicating that they exist. See his "Defense Sufficiency and Security," Moscow *Novoye v Zhizni, Nauke, Tekhnike: Seriya "Mezhdunarodnaya"* in Russian, no. 4, 1990, pp. 1-64 (JPRS-UMA-90-008-L, June 20, 1990, p. 20).

(5) *The Voroshilov Lectures: Materials from the Soviet General Staff Academy*, Vol. I: Issues of Soviet Military Strategy, Compiled by Ghulam D. Wardak, Graham H. Turbiville, Jr., gen. ed., Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, June 1989, pp. 72, 81, 250, 257.

(6) Marshal of the Soviet Union Vasiley Danilovich Sokolovskiy, ed., *Soviet Military Strategy*, 3rd ed., with an analysis and commentary by Harriet Fast Scott, ed. (New York, NY: Crane, Russak, 1980 - 1st paper ed.), pp. 285-303.

(7) For example, new strategic missions were proposed in the draft Russian military doctrine of May 1992. See, "Fundamentals of Russian Military Doctrine (Draft)," Moscow *Voyennaya Mysl* in Russian, Special Edition, May 1992, pp. 3-9 (JPRS-UMT-92-008-L, June 16, 1992, pp. 3-4).

(8) General-Major Yuriy V. Lebedev, General-Lieutenant (Retired) I.S. Lyutov, and Colonel V.A. Nazarenko, "Persian Gulf War: Lessons and Conclusions," Moscow *Voyennaya Mysl* in Russian, nos. 11-12 (December 1991): 109-117 (JPRS-UMT-92-005-L, March 23, 1992, p. 64).

(9) James J. Tritten, "Is Naval Warfare Unique?" *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, 12, no. 4 (December 1989): 494-507.

(10) We previously knew that the Soviet participation in World War II was referred to as the "Great Patriotic War" but we learned that this war will be referred to as the "**Second** Great Patriotic War" in deference to a previous war in defense of the homeland when Russia was invaded by French emperor Napoleon Bonaparte.

(11) Lothar Rühl, "Offensive Defense in the Warsaw Pact," *Survival*, 33, no. 5 (September/October 1991): 442-450.

(12) Christopher Andrew and Oleg Gordievsky, *KGB: The Inside Story* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 1990), pp. 582-593.

(13) James J. Tritton, "The New American National Security Strategy," *Moscow SSHA: Ekonomika, Politika, Ideologiya* in Russian, no. 12 (December 1991): 28-43.

(14) Sergey Kuznetsov reports carried by Moscow TASS International Service in Russian, 0125 and 0753 GMT, January 26, 1992 (FBIS-SOV-92-017, January 27, 1992, p. 1).

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